

**Montgomery County Councilmember Marilyn J. Praisner's Testimony  
on the Inter County Connector Draft Environment Impact Statement**

**January 8, 2005  
Blake High School**

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Let me start by saying that I continue to believe that the ICC cannot be built because it would cause considerable, irreversible environmental damage. Now, after my preliminary review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), I am also concerned about the costs and relative long term impacts on Montgomery County's traffic problems

Originally, I was going to spend most of my time explaining my reasons for coming to these conclusions, but after staying in my office late last night reading Park and Planning staff comments on the DEIS, I decided that the most pressing issue and the most important point I need to make today is that the public is NOT being given enough time to comment. Your brochure may be helpful but it cannot replace reviewing the entire document. I may run out of time before I finish my comments, but I feel I must drive home the point that the public comment period MUST be extended at least until March 1st. After reading what our knowledgeable planning staff wrote, information which won't be available to the public until Monday, I am convinced that the DEIS is such a complex and disjointed puzzle that no one could make sense of it and still deliver meaningful comments on the entire document in the short time provided. Just as an example, the planning staff, on page four of its 40+ page report, notes that information is presented in such a fragmented fashion that readers must themselves excerpt information from several tables found on separate pages and combine them to reasonably compare environmental impacts. Folks, this process is barreling along so fast, that no one has had time to make

sense of what's really happening. When we're talking about spending close to three billion dollars, I say we better put on the brakes and make sure we know what we're buying. The taxpayers deserve at least that much consideration.

Now, onto the remainder of my comments.

The public has been told that the ICC is one of the lynchpins in Montgomery's efforts to solve traffic congestion. It has been sold as the road that will "end gridlock." Yet the document shows that the ICC would do little to ease Beltway traffic congestion and raises questions on long term benefits for neighborhood roads.

The DEIS reveals that the ICC will actually *increase* traffic congestion at a number of key interchanges, most notably at I-270, Route 97, and Route 29. While SHA claims that these increases result from pulling traffic from local roads, any relief on our local roads is not likely to last. Let me tell you why.

Regarding the "Secondary and Cumulative Effects" of building an ICC, the Expert Land Use Panel predicts that if the ICC is built on Corridor 1, the amount of development along that roadway can be expected to double what it would have been if the road had not been built. If the ICC were to be built along Corridor 2, even more development would result. Surely you say, these projections must be included in the DEIS travel forecasts. THEY ARE NOT. So it seems reasonable to conclude that any reduction in traffic levels on local roads could be offset by increased development. To those who say we will hold the line on future growth or that the predictions only reflect accelerated timing of already planned growth, I say this expectation is unrealistic given recent history and the likely pressures for development to come. So how can this road be the panacea it has been made out to be? The answer is it isn't.

A few short comments on Corridor 1 and Corridor 2 to be expanded on in my written testimony to be submitted later. The proposed alternatives for Corridor 2 fly in the face of every land use planning concept ever adopted in Montgomery County. We need to get it off the table now. It was never intended as an alternative for the ICC. All of the Corridor 2 options slice through the County's low-density wedge, in some cases cutting neighborhoods in two, seriously impacting historic resources, and taking the homes and businesses of residents who relied on master plan promises. Some options endanger the Patuxent Watershed, a key environmental resource and one tied closely to the water supply for millions of people. Further, people living along Corridor 2 would lose a significant transportation route if the ICC uses the Norbeck Road Connector (MD 28/198) alignment. This major throughway would simply cease to exist, forcing additional traffic onto local roads and connections.

There are some who argue that because Corridor 1 has been on the map since the 60s, we need not spend too much time studying it before the bulldozers start clearing a path. I disagree. When this project was first conceived, many important environmental policies did not exist and little thought was given to the Chesapeake Bay and the fact that major watersheds in Montgomery County runs north/south and lie in the path of the road. Less than a decade ago the Federal permitting agencies recognized the significant environmental impacts of Corridor 1 and refused to approve its construction.

As for the proposed environmental mitigation measures, they are not adequate given the high-quality, highly-valued natural resources involved. These impacts are associated with loss or degradation of forests, steep slopes, stream corridors, biodiversity areas, best natural areas and special protection areas. This is especially true if we are serious about

protecting the Paint Branch. SHA must identify additional land for outright purchase and preservation to offset the huge amounts of impervious surfaces. If you really want to reflect the true costs of this project, and if you are really serious about mitigation, then get out that checkbook and start buying land! If you don't, I am concerned the more stringent but necessary and costly control measures will not be pursued at a later time. If the Paint Branch is damaged, the mitigation measures may not be adequate to restore the resource.

I agree with the County Executive that building the ICC without a bikeway is short-sighted. If your goal is truly traffic relief then why would you eliminate such an important alternative? As Mr. Duncan noted, the proposed costs for the bikeway can be significantly reduced by integrating the ICC bike path into existing bikeways within our park system.

Finally, I want to add a little more about my earlier comments regarding the public's opportunity and right to be heard. Because the ICC is such a huge, expensive project the "fast track" process makes it difficult for many people to digest the information and issues raised in the DEIS. Artificial timelines are not more important than the goal of allowing the affected communities adequate time to comment in a fair and open manner. Besides all the other obstacles to commenting, the average computer owner probably cannot download the entire 1,495 pages of this report and hard copies are a challenge to obtain and review. Therefore, I support the request that public hearings be held in February and I repeat my request that the comment period be extended to March 1, 2005.

Thank you for listening and I hope the State will very carefully consider all the information in the DEIS. I will submit additional comments in writing later.